

EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR  
COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR  
CONCERN**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, June 13, 2014*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I recently chaired a hearing on effective accountability for countries that blatantly commit religious or freedom violations or that turn a blind eye to such violations within their borders.

The headlines are filled with examples. A 27-year-old mother, Meriam Yehya Ibrahim, is imprisoned and faces a death sentence in Sudan because she refused to renounce her Christian faith. This case in Sudan mirrors a similar incident in Nigeria in which Boko Haram shot Habila Adamu, who refused to renounce Christianity, just like Mrs. Ibrahim. Also in Nigeria, Islamic terrorist organization Boko Haram is holding over 200 school girls hostage (most of whom are Christian), after kidnapping them from their school dorms in the middle of the night.

Anti-semitism has resurfaced in Ukraine with a series of violent attacks following the ouster of former Prime Minister Yanukovich.

We have also received word that American Pastor Saed Abedini, who is serving an 8 year sentence in Iran for his faith, was severely beaten and returned to prison. He had been hospitalized due to internal bleeding from beatings previously received in prison. His wife, Naghmeh Abedini, testified before my subcommittee in December and begged that the Administration make securing her husband's release a top priority.

Tragically, many countries of the world are a long way from recognizing the human right of religious freedom set forth by Article 18 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In the United States, we claim religious freedom as the "first freedom" because of its placement at the top of the Bill of Rights enumerated in our Constitution, and because of its foundational role in the life of a free and democratic nation. Religious freedom is a constant reminder to governments that their power is limited, that governments do not create rights but merely recognize them, and that a man or woman's first duty is to his or her well-formed conscience.

The evidence bears out the importance of protecting and promoting religious freedom. As the Pew Research Center and Berkley Center at Georgetown have shown, governments that protect and promote religious freedom have higher levels of social harmony. Just as importantly for national security, high observance of religious freedom is correlated with lower levels of religious extremism.

In 1998, Congress had the foresight to make the protection and promotion of religious freedom a priority in U.S. foreign policy by creating an Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom, the Office of International Religious Freedom at the Department of State, which authors the International Religious Freedom Reports on every country in the world, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, with their watchdog report to Congress.

Importantly, this landmark piece of legislation, the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), authored by Chairman FRANK WOLF of Virginia, created a system for naming and taking action against Countries of Particular Concern or CPCs.

Sixteen years later, the need for U.S. leadership on religious freedom could not be more critical—but the tools to achieve it are lightly used. The Administration recently announced its intention to appoint two new members to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom—but the post of Ambassador-at-Large is in its seventh month of vacancy. The post has been empty for more than a third of this Administration, and the Ambassador's level of authority within the State Department has been demoted.

Despite the fact that the IRFA called for an annual review of CPC designations, the Administration has not named CPCs since 2011. What few Presidential Actions—like sanctions—have been taken in correlation with the 2011 CPC designation, have now lapsed.

History has shown that when the United States makes religious freedom a priority and that priority is conveyed to countries of particular concern, we have seen conditions change with minimal harm to security or economic cooperation. For instance, the CPC designation worked as intended with Vietnam—until it was removed prematurely.

In 2004, the Bush Administration designated Vietnam as a CPC as part of the larger bilateral relationship. Vietnam took positive steps toward reforming its laws and practices related to religious freedom and releasing religious prisoners.

Other parts of the relationship—trade and security cooperation—expanded at the same time. Vietnam saw that it was in its interest to take positive steps on religious freedom because it was a priority of the Administration and a prerequisite of a harmonious bilateral relationship.

In 2006, the CPC designation was removed prematurely. In 2007, shortly after Vietnam gained World Trade Organization status, it launched a crackdown on religious leaders, free speech advocates, labor unions, and others that continues to this day.

USCIRF has made a compelling case for why Vietnam should be designated as a CPC, why that designation would again produce results, and why it is in the United States interests to prioritize religious freedom in the bilateral relationship. Seven years later, we are waiting for CPC designation.

The hearing took a close look at the ongoing need for the United States to actively pursue religious freedom as a priority goal of its foreign policy, as intended by Congress in the IRFA, and, specifically, the work of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom in reaching this goal.

## NATIONAL MEN'S HEALTH WEEK

**HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, June 13, 2014*

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of National Men's Health Week from June 9–15, 2014.

Men's Health Week is a time to focus attention and heighten awareness of preventable health problems affecting men and boys and encourage early detection and treatment.

On May 24, 1994, Congress passed S.J. Res. 179, a joint resolution establishing National Men's Health Week (NMHW). The joint resolution was signed into law (Pub. L. 103–264) by President William Jefferson Clinton on May 31, 1994.

Men's Health Month is celebrated across the country with screenings, health fairs, media appearances, and other health education and outreach activities.

I encourage all men, young and older, and their families, to develop positive and proactive attitudes toward health and wellness, engage in preventive behaviors, lead healthy lifestyles, and seek timely medical advice and care.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men, afflicting 1 out of every 11 American men and killing 34,000 men every year.

For African-American men, the rate of affliction is even worse; African-American men have the highest incidence of prostate cancer in the world.

In the past 5 years, the death rate for prostate cancer has grown at almost twice the death rate of breast cancer.

National Men's Health Network has encouraged the development of thousands of health awareness activities as corporations, hospital systems, clinics, faith-based communities, the public sector, and others use the month of June to highlight their services and reach out to men and their families.

Mr. Speaker, much progress has been made in the past 20 years with improvements in the health and well-being of men and boys, with a dramatic improvement in life expectancy and surprising drops in key mortality indicators.

There has been a steep drop among males in overall mortality, and corresponding improvements in the mortality rates for cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

Our goal this month should be to raise awareness about men's health in our communities and to support National Men's Health Week and to rededicate ourselves to providing support for our men by further educating ourselves and our communities on Men's Health and effects.

Recognizing and preventing men's health problems is not just a man's issue because it impacts wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters.

Men's health is truly a family issue.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in the recognition of National Men's Health Week, and ask all Americans to take time this month to find out what you can do to help the growing population of the men around you.

HONORING MARY ALLEN  
LINDEMANN AND ALAN SPEAR**HON. CHELLIE PINGREE**

OF MAINE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, June 13, 2014*

Ms. PINGREE of Maine. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a wife-and-husband team in my District for being selected as the Small Business Administration's Maine Small Business Person of the Year for 2014.